DIGITAL HUMANITIES START-UP GRANTS

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the humanities?

According to the 1965 National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities Act, "The term 'humanities' includes, but is not limited to, the study of the following: language, both modern and classical; linguistics; literature; history; jurisprudence; philosophy; archaeology; comparative religion; ethics; the history, criticism and theory of the arts; those aspects of social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods; and the study and application of the humanities to the human environment with particular attention to reflecting our diverse heritage, traditions, and history and to the relevance of the humanities to the current conditions of national life."

What do you mean by innovation?

An innovative project creates something new, offering an interesting new approach to tackling a problem. Innovation can take many forms. Some funded Start-Up Grant projects are examples of technical innovation, such as the creation of a new piece of software to address a need in the humanities. In other cases, the innovation does not consist of creating new technology; instead the project makes use of an existing technology in a new way. For example, an applicant might take existing software used for some other purpose and demonstrate how it could be effectively used for humanities research. In still other cases, the innovation does not pertain to the technology per se; instead it is the project collaboration that is innovative, as with projects that bring together creative individuals from both technical and nontechnical fields to address a longstanding humanities issue in a new way. True innovation is rare, and reasonable people can disagree as to what constitutes innovation. You therefore need to make a strong case for the innovative character of the proposed project.

What constitutes "revitalizing and/or recovering existing digital projects"?

Start-Up Grants are not just for completely new projects. They can also support the expansion of existing projects in innovative or experimental ways, and the restarting of projects that are valuable but have languished (and thus need substantive changes in their design, technical architecture, and dissemination and preservation strategies). Start-Up Grants do not, however,

support regular, ongoing maintenance of existing projects. Activities that can be supported include

- the testing and evaluation of an established project with target audiences to determine needs and priorities;

- the redesign of the project's interface to align with current web design standards, including those that address accessibility for audiences with disabilities;

- the integration of widely used digital tools (for example, tools used for annotation or visualization) into an established project;

- the redevelopment of underlying technologies or standards to prepare project data for incorporation into a federated or discipline-specific platform such as the Digital Public Library of America, Open Context, etc.; and

- the creation or revision of a plan to manage an established project's data—including digitized images, scholarly essays, annotations, social media, etc.—in the long term. The plan should include a strategy for archiving and sharing data, even if the project is no longer being updated regularly.

Do Start-Up Grants support projects that study digital culture, in addition to projects that use digital techniques to address issues in the humanities?

Yes.

May a non-U.S. institution or organization apply for a grant?

NEH does not provide support to foreign institutions or organizations. However, American institutions may apply for cooperative projects involving U.S. and foreign individuals or organizations. If you are interested in submitting an application for a project involving international collaborators, please consult beforehand with the staff of the Office of Digital Humanities.

I am an independent scholar. Am I eligible to apply for a Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant as an individual?

Individual applicants are not eligible to apply for Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants. Only eligible institutions may submit applications.

Who will read my grant application?

A variety of individuals will read your application, including peer reviewers, NEH staff, and members of the NEH National Council on the Humanities.

We therefore strongly emphasize that you should write your application so that readers without technical knowledge can understand it. We realize that your project may be technical in nature and that part of the application may have to address complex technological issues. But particularly in your abstract and the first portion of your narrative, you should write for a

general audience that is familiar with the humanities, but may have no specific knowledge of technology or of your project's relation to the humanities. In these sections of the application you should make a "big picture" case for your project's contribution to the humanities.

Your application will be read by many individuals with different backgrounds, from different disciplines, with varying degrees of familiarity with the methodologies used in digital scholarship. You must therefore make a case to this broad audience. Consider, for example, how you might make a case for your project if you were describing it to your provost, dean, or college president. Alternatively, consider how you might briefly describe the project to a new acquaintance outside your field. Your abstract and narrative should be crafted to appeal to individuals like these.

While this advice is specifically tailored to applications for Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants, it applies more broadly to applications for all NEH grants. Still, applications for digital projects in particular must be written to ensure that readers without technical knowledge can understand the significance of the project to the humanities.

May my institution apply for more than one Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant at a time?

Yes. Institutions may apply for and hold more than one of these grants, but project directors may submit only one application to this program at a time.

I would like to send a draft proposal for NEH staff comment. How do I do that?

Although submitting a draft is not mandatory, applicants are encouraged to submit a draft. In order to guarantee NEH review of the draft, it should reach NEH at least six weeks before the deadline. Draft proposals should be submitted via e-mail to odh@neh.gov.

Should the project participants and our institution include letters of commitment as part of our application or should they be sent separately?

Letters of commitment should be included with the application.

Whom should I ask to provide letters of support?

Letters of support should come from persons who can objectively assess the importance of the project to the humanities. These persons should comment on the importance of the project's subject area, the proposed methodology, or the technical plan. They should not be project participants. Also, the letters should be sent to the project director (not separately to NEH) and submitted with the application.

I would like to include a "works cited" page or bibliography in my application. Where should I insert this?

Please include this component in the appendices section of the application.

I would like to develop a new website to present material on a humanities topic. Is that the right sort of project for a Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant?

Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants are conceived as grants to support the initial phases of projects offering innovative approaches to the use of emerging technologies in the humanities. Projects that simply use existing technologies to make new materials more readily available are therefore unlikely to receive Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants. If, however, your proposed work involves the early stages in the development of new Web technologies or new methods of indexing or incorporating metadata into an online collection, you would appear to have a stronger case for receiving a Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant.

The project that I have in mind seems compatible with the guidelines for another NEH grant program, but it also seems to fit as a Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant. To which program should I apply?

Generally, projects that can be supported through other NEH grant programs and that seek to achieve the goals of the other grant programs should be addressed to those programs. However, no rules prevent an applicant from submitting an application to more than one NEH grant program, so long as the application is appropriately modified to fit the guidelines of the different programs. If you are not certain to which grant program you should apply, contact NEH program staff for guidance. The staff for Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants can be reached at odh@neh.gov.

Does NEH limit the amount of indirect costs that can be included as part of an application for a Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant?

No. An institution may charge its negotiated rate in the application budget. Note, though, that the indirect costs are included in the amount awarded for the grant; they are not added to the grant amount. (For example, the maximum award in this program is $75,000. This means that NEH would support no more than $75,000 of a project's costs, including the indirect as well as the direct project costs.)

Is cost sharing required for a Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant?

Cost sharing is not required for Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants. However, applicants are welcome to use cost sharing for Start-Up projects in which the total budget exceeds the NEH grant limit. Cost sharing consists of the cash contributions made to a project by the applicant and third parties, as well as third party in-kind contributions, such as donated services and goods.

On the Supplementary Cover Sheet for NEH Grant Programs, question number 1 asks for the project director's major field of study. Our project director's field of study is not, however, in the humanities. Will it be on the list?

NEH has recently revised the listed choices for the project director's major field of study. The list is now much more comprehensive, incorporating many more academic and professional occupations and fields, both within and outside the humanities.

How many deadlines are there each year for the Digital Humanities Start-Up Grants program?

In the past the program had two deadlines per year. The program now has only one deadline per year.

My previous application was unsuccessful. What can I do to increase my chances for success this time?

You should request copies of the evaluators' comments. A revised application should take into consideration the issues that they raised. Note, though, that the resubmitted application will be reviewed by persons who will not have knowledge of or access to the previous application.